

# Chapter 2: Emergency Coordination & Communications

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Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to coordinate their emergency management activities, including public communications. The three countries share a common approach based on the four pillars of emergency management: prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to work collaboratively in each of these areas to manage the threat of avian and pandemic influenza.

- **Prevention and mitigation** activities are directed at minimizing the effects of an avian or pandemic influenza, including direct outcomes (e.g., illness and death) and indirect associated effects (e.g., economic and social impacts). The three countries intend to implement these activities in a series of steps that would be coordinated to the greatest extent possible.
- **Preparedness** requires that national contingency plans be in place for activities associated with an outbreak, including surveillance, detection, containment and response efforts. Training and regular joint exercises with stakeholders to practice and test these plans are essential.
- **Response** activities will depend on the characteristics of the avian or pandemic virus (virulence, attack rate, groups at highest risk, patterns of transmission), which cannot be known in advance. If necessary, the three countries intend to implement activities such as animal or public health measures, information sharing and non-pharmaceutical interventions (hand washing, isolation of the sick, etc.) apply them consistently and regularly, and assess their efficacy to determine whether adjustments to a planned response are necessary.
- **Recovery** activities enable the restoration of “normal” or pre-pandemic service levels. The three countries intend to initiate these post-event activities as soon as possible, recognizing that they may start at different times across the continent as the pandemic waves move through geographic areas.

## Overview of Federal Emergency Management Structures

Canada, Mexico and the United States each have designated organizations, plans and facilities in place, consistent with their governmental structures and authorities, to manage these activities during an outbreak of avian influenza or an influenza pandemic.

### Canada

Emergency management responsibilities in Canada are shared by federal, provincial and territorial governments and their partners, including individual citizens who have a responsibility to be prepared for disasters. Provincial and territorial governments have responsibility for emergency management within their respective jurisdictions. The federal government exercises leadership at the national level relating to emergency management responsibilities in its exclusive fields of jurisdictions and on lands and properties under federal responsibility.

### Key Federal Organizations

- **Public Safety Canada** is the federal department that coordinates the overall federal government’s domestic response efforts and provides support to government and key national players in responding to events of national significance. Within Public Safety Canada, the Government Operations Centre (GOC) operates around the clock as a mechanism to communicate and coordinate with federal, provincial and territorial emergency operations centers.
- **The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)** is mandated to take the lead role in responding to animal health emergencies and has developed many detailed plans and procedures in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada, WHO and others. The CFIA is the primary agency responsible for prevention, preparation and response to an avian influenza outbreak, supported by Public Safe-

ty Canada. The CFIA has collaborative agreements with federal and provincial government partners that outline roles and responsibilities prior to and during an avian influenza outbreak.

- **The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)** monitors the international and domestic influenza situation and has developed *The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector* in collaboration with provincial/territorial representatives. PHAC is the primary federal agency addressing pandemic influenza preparedness and response, supported by Public Safety Canada and Health Canada.
- **Health Canada** engages and coordinates efforts among domestic and international health partners. The department is also responsible for supporting preparedness and response efforts in First Nations on reserve and Inuit communities; ensuring regulatory preparedness, including accelerated approval of a pandemic influenza vaccine; and spearheading federal workplace health initiatives.
- **The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT)** is responsible for the coordination of Canada's international response, including international efforts to contain the spread of a pandemic virus; communicating with foreign governments and international organizations; and managing foreign offers of assistance. DFAIT is also responsible for providing travel advice and responding to the consular needs of Canadians in distress.

## Emergency Plans

**The Canadian Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health Sector.** The aim of this guidance document is to support health sector planning at the facility, local, regional, provincial/territorial and federal level. It covers prevention, preparedness and response activities including surveillance, vaccine programs, use of antivirals, health services, public health measures and communications.

### Notifiable Avian Influenza Hazard Specific Plan.

This plan outlines the response to be undertaken by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) when there is suspicion of a developing outbreak of notifiable avian influenza (NAI) or when an outbreak occurs.

**The Government of Canada Coordination Contingency Plan for Avian and Pandemic Influenza.** The aim of this “whole of government” plan is to coordinate responsibilities across the federal government and other agencies.

### An Emergency Management Framework for Canada.

The aim of this framework document is to enable consolidation of federal, provincial and territorial collaborative work and ensure more coherent, complementary action among the different federal, provincial and territorial government initiatives.

## Mexico

### Key Organizations

- **The Ministry of Health of Mexico (MoH)**, as the head of the **National Committee for Health Security (NCHS)**, is the lead agency for coordinating national preparedness and response activities related to public health emergencies such as an influenza pandemic, supporting the development and implementation of plans at the federal, state and local levels. The NCHS includes all the federal areas of responsibility relevant to the response to a pandemic (civil Protection, health sector, armed forces, agriculture, environment, communications and transportation, law enforcement). The MoH directly carries out epidemiological surveillance and laboratory confirmation, as well as health care services organization, regulation and provision. The preparedness and response activities to an influenza pandemic are stated in the *National Preparedness and Response Plan for Pandemic Influenza*, first published in September 2005.
- Emergency management of any kind in Mexico is coordinated by the **General Coordination for Civil Protection (GCCP) of the Ministry of the Interior**. The GCCP distributes available resources for emergency response and operates through a network of municipal and state civil protection agencies. In case of an influenza pandemic, the NCHS and the National Committee for Civil Protection will work together for addressing the threat.
- Since 1996, Mexico has had a strong avian influenza eradication campaign led by the **Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)**, which is the federal agency

responsible for protecting poultry production in the country. The MoA works closely with the **Ministry of the Environment (MoE)**, which is responsible for monitoring disease activity in migratory and other wild bird species that could endanger the poultry industry. Disease surveillance, laboratory diagnosis, inspection of farms and other facilities, and regulation of importation and exportation are among MoA activities.

- The **Secretariat of Foreign Affairs** will be responsible for coordinating interactions of Mexico with other foreign governments and international organizations at senior levels, and will also direct the overall flow of international cooperative efforts. Furthermore, it will make assistance and guidance available to ensure consular protection to the Mexican population living or travelling abroad during a pandemic.

## Emergency Plans

The *National Preparedness and Response Plan for Pandemic Influenza* establishes the general principles for mitigating the impact of a pandemic in the country and serves as guidelines for the development of state, local and institutional preparedness plans. It includes activities to be carried out by the institutions of the NCHS in six lines of action: health promotion and risk communications, coordination, epidemiological surveillance and laboratory, health care provision, strategic stockpile, and research and development.

## United States

### Key Organizations

- **The Department of Homeland Security (DHS)** is responsible for the coordination of the federal government's operations and resources, the establishment of reporting requirements and the conduct of ongoing communications for domestic incident management. In the context of a pandemic, as with any other domestic incident in which more than one department is involved, the Secretary of Homeland Security is responsible for providing overall coordination as the Principal Federal Official, in accordance with the *National*

*Response Plan*. DHS will coordinate actions with regard to overall non-medical support and response. DHS will also ensure necessary support to public health and medical emergency response efforts coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services. Within DHS, the **National Operations Center (NOC)**, a standing 24-hour, seven-days-per-week interagency organization that fuses law enforcement, national intelligence, emergency response and private sector reporting, is the primary national hub for domestic incident management, operational coordination and situational awareness. The NOC facilitates homeland security information sharing and operational coordination with other federal state, local, tribal and non-governmental emergency operations centers.

- **The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)** will lead federal efforts with regard to public health and medical response efforts to a pandemic influenza. The HHS Secretary will be the principal federal spokesperson for public health and medical issues, coordinating closely with DHS on public messaging pertaining to the pandemic. HHS published a *Pandemic Influenza Plan* in November 2005 and the *HHS Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan* in November 2006, both of which serve as blueprints for HHS pandemic influenza preparedness planning and response activities.
- **The Department of State (DOS)** coordinates the federal government's international engagement to promote development of global capacity to address pandemic influenza. DOS also coordinates the federal government's international efforts to prepare for and respond to a pandemic, including facilitating the interagency process to identify countries requiring U.S. assistance, identifying priority activities and ensuring federal government assistance reflects those priorities.
- **The Department of Defense (DOD)** will support primary federal departments (DHS, HHS, and DOS) and state governments in limiting the impact of pandemic influenza and sustaining critical infrastructure functionality. DOD will work with the Canadian Department of National Defence and the Mexican Ministry of Defense and military organizations to ensure a cooperative effort in applying military resources to prepare for and

contain a pandemic influenza. DOD will respond to requests for assistance from the United States Government and will apply available resources with approval of the Secretary of Defense.

- **The Department of Agriculture (USDA)** works together with federal, state and industry partners to protect the United States against the rapid spread of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza. Safeguards include trade restrictions; wild bird monitoring; federal, state and industry testing of poultry; federal inspection procedures at slaughter and processing plants; and rapid response plans. USDA also participates in coordinated overseas efforts to slow the spread of avian influenza in poultry.
- **The Department of Transportation (DOT)**, in cooperation with other key domestic (e.g., HHS, DHS and DOS) and international partners (e.g., Mexico's Secretariat of Communications and Transportation), is responsible for the coordinated development and implementation of transportation-focused plans to slow the spread of an avian influenza outbreak or influenza pandemic. DOT also works with these key stakeholders on preparedness, prevention, response, mitigation and recovery efforts intended to sustain the U.S. transportation system, as well as counterpart systems in partner countries. Recognizing the special challenges posed by the global aviation system, DOT's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is particularly active in working with its domestic partners, as well as with its Canadian and Mexican counterparts, on the above efforts.

## Emergency Plans

- The White House released the *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* and subsequently the *Implementation Plan* for the strategy. These documents guide the U.S. Government's efforts to prepare for and respond to avian and pandemic influenza.
- The *National Response Plan (NRP)*, administered by DHS, is the core plan for managing domestic incidents. It details the federal coordinating structures and processes used during incidents of national significance, including the federal pan-

demetic response. It also defines federal departmental responsibilities for sector-specific responses and provides the structure and mechanisms for effective coordination among federal, state, local and tribal authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

## International Legal Framework

Canada, Mexico and the United States are States Parties to the International Health Regulations (2005)<sup>1</sup>, or IHRs, and, as member countries of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), observe the guidelines and standards provided in the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (2006).

In the event of an outbreak of avian influenza, each country would advise the OIE on confirmation of the isolation and identification of a virus described in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* as notifiable avian influenza, and implement contingency plans to control and/or eradicate the virus from domestic poultry operations.

In the event of an influenza pandemic, the IHRs provide a legal framework under which States Parties and the WHO secretariat are to work together to protect against and control the international spread of disease while avoiding unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. The IHRs establish a transparent process to be followed by the WHO and IHR States Parties in response to public health emergencies of international concern. Provisions in the IHRs obligate States Parties to:

- Notify the WHO of all potential public health emergencies of international concern that occur within their territories;
- Develop, strengthen, and maintain core capacity for surveillance, reporting, and response; and
- Establish a national focal point as the contact point for the WHO on all IHR matters.

1 Prior to the IHRs' entry into force, the WHO's 59<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly in 2006 adopted a resolution that called upon WHO Member States to "comply immediately, on a voluntary basis, with provisions of the International Health Regulations (2005) considered relevant to the risk posed by avian influenza and pandemic influenza." Canada, Mexico and the United States voluntarily implemented relevant provisions of the IHRs.

## North American Coordination

Canada, Mexico and the United States have established the senior level Coordinating Body on Avian and Pandemic Influenza<sup>2</sup> to facilitate planning and preparedness within North America for a possible outbreak of avian and/or human pandemic influenza. This Coordinating Body is to serve as the contact group in the event of an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza or a novel strain of human influenza. It is to convene to support rapid and coordinated decision making, facilitate information sharing and address other coordination issues. Because the trilateral Coordinating Body includes senior officials from most of the key agencies that would be involved in supporting the response to an avian influenza outbreak or pandemic influenza, it is intended to play a significant role in promoting coordination among the three countries at senior official levels.

Each country intends to use existing emergency management structures for decision making at the national level. Canada, Mexico and the United States are to review existing emergency coordination and communication mechanisms and enhance the exchange of detailed operations plans.

## Emergency Response Assistance

The provisions according to which Canada, Mexico or the United States may request emergency response assistance of one another include:

- When national human or material resources are overextended;
- When an avian or pandemic influenza event in any of the three countries poses a potential threat to either of the other two countries; or
- When an avian or pandemic influenza outbreak requires robust coordination of the North American response in order to minimize the risk to animal and public health, minimize damage, and provide the basis for long-term social and economic recovery.

## Joint Exercises And Training

Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to work to enhance the interface among their respective emergency management/response structures through joint exercises and training. The three countries should make every effort to:

- Implement multilateral, scenario-driven exercises involving internal and external stakeholders to test planning actions;
- Continually assess preparedness activities to adjust objectives, effects and actions based upon changes in the economic and social environments; and
- Continuously assess planned response and recovery actions so that they remain the best projected actions to achieve success.

Specifically, the authorities of Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to conduct trilateral or bilateral exercises to assess and strengthen their emergency response and contingency plans. In addition, each country intends to design and deliver training to maximize the effectiveness of its respective emergency response and contingency plans. Wherever possible, training and exercises should be designed to maximize stakeholder involvement.

## Avian and Pandemic Influenza Communications

Accurate and timely information before and during an outbreak of avian or pandemic influenza will be critical to the successful management of the situation. The public, governments and their key stakeholders need appropriate information to make effective and timely decisions.

This purposeful exchange of information among governments, the public and stakeholders, designed to prompt appropriate action, is generally referred to as “risk communications.” A common understanding of and approach to the subject of risk communications can help reduce the consequences of an outbreak of disease, including loss of life, serious illness, and social and economic disruption.

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2 The Terms of Reference for the Coordinating Body on Avian and Pandemic Influenza can be found in Annex 2



Coordinated risk communications planning should:

- Create strong communications networks (nationally and internationally);
- Define clear expectations of what governments will communicate during an outbreak of avian or pandemic influenza; and
- Develop consistent and coordinated messages.

Effective communications to manage a potential risk involve more than the sharing of information in response to an outbreak of disease. Individuals require information in advance of an event to develop an understanding of the potential effects of an outbreak in either humans or birds and to take appropriate action. Once an outbreak has begun, individuals may have limited ability to absorb and respond to new information.

The three countries, therefore, recognize the importance of risk communications and believe they should be incorporated in avian and pandemic preparedness planning as a key mitigation strategy.

Risk communications activities that the three countries may pursue include:

- Consulting with key organizations to solicit input and advice;
- Gauging the level of knowledge and concern among individuals and groups and the barriers to adopting appropriate behavior; and
- Disseminating information advising how people can protect themselves if an outbreak of avian or pandemic influenza were to occur, (e.g., information on personal protective measures).

### **Coordinated Communications**

Canada, Mexico and the United States intend to communicate effectively about avian and pandemic influenza in a cooperative and coordinated manner, as described below:

- All three countries recognize that collaboration on communications efforts at all stages of avian and pandemic influenza management will minimize the possibility of conflicting information or contradictory messages;

- Every effort should be made to cooperate and communicate openly in order to help instill confidence in the North American response and recovery strategies and activities;

- Each country recognizes that the challenges to be faced will differ in each stage of response to avian or pandemic influenza. The three countries intend

to work together to focus on common elements for informed decision making and actions;

- The objectives of each country's communications efforts should focus on coordinating actions and pursuing common approaches to achieve proactive, timely and accurate communications.

To achieve these goals, the three countries intend to:

- Meet regularly on communications issues and seek opportunities to work together on communications planning and messaging;
- Establish procedures and pathways to exchange pre-release information during the event;
- Identify appropriate communications point persons from each country to maintain regular contact, share information, and identify and address emerging issues;
- Develop plans for communications coordination during the actual event of an outbreak of avian or pandemic influenza;
- Undertake the development of risk communications strategies to provide stakeholders with information on disease prevention, disease recognition, bio-security procedures and their responsibilities in the event of an incursion of avian or pandemic influenza;
- Pursue the development of risk communications strategies in relation to pandemic influenza to help decision makers and individuals make well-informed decisions and take appropriate actions on health risk issues to help reduce mortality, morbidity and socio-economic disruption;
- Develop key messages related to avian and pandemic influenza for the specific use of senior officials;

- Pursue the development of communications messages for avian influenza and both pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. Messages would focus on core themes such as efforts to control spread of avian influenza, import/export measures, border measure, etc.;
- Share best practices and identify gaps in behavioral research;
- Develop a research agenda based on this information;
- Develop procedures and pathways for how communications networks will operate during the event (e.g., regular conference calls, etc.); and
- Commit to developing opportunities to exercise the planned response.